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THE
IRISH CHURCH
AND
ITS FORMULARIES.

A LETTER
TO THE
LORD PRIMATE OF ALL IRELAND.

BY
A. J. B. BERESFORD HOPE, M.P.

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MY DEAR LORD PRIMATE,

I venture to assume your forgiveness for placing on paper some thoughts upon the present policy of the Irish Church, and for throwing these thoughts into the form of a letter to yourself, in obedience alike to my respect for your office, and to my affection for your person. I need not remind your Grace that there are circumstances which make the well-being of the Irish Church a subject of more especial personal concern to myself than it can be to most members of the English branch of our one common Church. I trust, therefore, that my brother Churchmen of Ireland will take in the same good part, as that in which they are offered, some friendly considerations upon the appointment, by the late Church Convention in Ireland, of the Committee which has been instructed "to consider whether, without making any such alterations in the Liturgy or Formularies of our Church as would involve or imply a change in her doctrines, any measure can be suggested calculated to check the introduction and spread of novel doctrines and practices opposed to the principles of our Reformed Church; and to report to the General Synod in 1871."

I do not think such a review, made by an Englishman from an English standing point, can be unacceptable

to my Irish friends. The members of the Irish Church have undoubtedly the right to claim for themselves that intimate knowledge of their own position and requirements which renders them in the last resort—now that their political connection with the Established Church of England has been rent—sole judges of the wisdom, not less than of the lawfulness of their own proceedings, as far as they affect the internal constitution of their community. This right I am the last man to infringe or call into question. But it is because the members of the Irish Church are the masters of their own actions, that outsiders can, without offence, take upon themselves the responsibility of a friendly criticism, which those to whom it is addressed may, if they please, ignore.

The one object which I have at heart in all that I shall say is the maintenance, unbroken and unweakened, of the strictest alliance between the Irish and the English Churches, convinced as I am that any rupture of the union which has for so long existed between them would be attended with most disastrous consequences to both communities. This union can, I believe, only be insured, as matters at present stand, by the joint acceptance, on both sides of St. George's Channel, of those identical formularies which were, at the moment of Irish disestablishment, a common inheritance. I do not say that these formularies must for all time to come remain the same, for this would be to limit the Christian liberty of Christian Churches. As little do I say that intercommunion, even under existing circumstances, could not be continued with variant formularies, for this would be to overlook, not only Church common law, but the present examples of the Episcopal Churches of Scotland and the United States, about which I shall have something to say further on. But I do assert that, as matters actually stand, and for reasons it may be of a temporary or a secondary

nature, which are yet substantial and cogent, the Irish Church might now risk painful embarrassments affecting her connection with that of England, by the very fact of altering, even in a few particulars, those formularies which are the joint inheritance of both. I make bold further to assert that any such breach of harmony would be so calamitous an event as to outbalance all possible advantage arising out of the additional paper bulwarks which might be thrown up against the advances of Popery on one side, or of Freethinking on the other.

After these remarks your Grace will not be astonished at the avowal that to me the advantage or disadvantage of the Committee appointed in the terms of the Duke of Abercorn's amendment turns upon one question of overpowering importance, "Does it, or does it not, by the letter of the resolution from which it takes its appointment, open the door to any possible revision at present, and for Ireland alone—irrespective of the English Church—of the existing formularies?" If it does not, it may be desirable or not, on general grounds, but I shall have nothing to say to it; if it does—however valuable it may be in other respects—it carries within itself, in my opinion, the seeds of fatal mischief.

If I am asked why I attach so much importance to the maintenance of identity between the Irish and the English Churches, I appeal to the wide circle of social and political facts. I appeal to that affinity of race, of language, of habits, of literature, and of religion, which allies the Church people of the two lands. I appeal to the bonds of friendship and of harmony so frequent between them. I appeal to the common danger, which menaces both, from Celtic jealousy. I appeal to their joint interest in the prosperity of a United Empire. I might appeal to material considerations; but it would be ungenerous to support my plea by such considera-

tions. I do appeal to the moral strength which will be given to the Irish Church, in its future conflict, by its continuing in harmony with the general religious tone of the majority of educated and religious-minded Churchmen in England, especially of that landed class, with whom in particular the lay leaders of Irish Church opinion are likely to come in contact. The Churchmanship of this class is undoubtedly one of moderation. Their type of worship is a system of decorous solemnity. They are, as a body, ready for improvement, and quick to appreciate it when calmly presented ; but they are alarmed at changes when suddenly demanded. The ceremonial which represents their feelings is that of the Prayer Book, as worked in an elastic spirit, and adapted to the special circumstances of each locality ; but not as re-enamelled either in the furnace of Rome, or in that of Geneva. They may not, in general, be controversialists : on the contrary, they are men of quiet, practical, methodical action ; and to persons of their temperament, therefore, a Prayer Book which they can accept as a whole, and by inheritance, is the instrument which best suits their fulfilment of religious duties, practical and devotional. A book in the formation of which, in person or by implication, they would be participants, and for which they would have to give a reason, would simply embarrass and repel them. While the English and the Irish Prayer Books remain the same, they need no deeper reason for sympathising with and aiding the Irish Church. Once introduce a difference, and you have thrown upon them to seek why they should continue to sympathise, and upon the Irish Church to meet that search with adequate arguments.

As a member of the Church of England, I have always in England raised my voice in favour of moderate opinions, and opened my ears to tolerant counsels. Most assuredly I have no leanings towards the Church of Rome, that unhappy communion which has recently crowned centuries of usurpation

and falsification with that assumption of personal infallibility, concentrated in its chief pastor, which has shocked and bewildered the public conscience of Christendom. Nor can I at all sympathise with the antagonistic systems either of stark and merciless Calvinism, or of gelatinous and creedless Latitudinarianism. Against all and any of these perversions of the Faith and polity of the Christian Church, I believe that the United Church of England of Ireland maintains a vigilant watch. Most naturally the Church of Ireland, thrown into local and immediate contact with a branch of the Roman Church, which, to the undisguised and truculent exhibition of the Papal system in its most repellent form, adds all the bitterness of an opposition blown up to white-heat by long antagonism of race, is peculiarly alive to dangers from the Papal side. But the Irish Church, while specially vigilant when vigilance is most apparently needed, will not, I am sure, be negligent on the side where the danger from being less conspicuous may really be more pressing. Nothing short of a cataclysm could Romanise a Church such as that of Ireland, placed like a beleaguered garrison within a large and violent Roman Catholic population. The risk might rather be a party alliance with those who, like itself, resist Rome, but who do not, like our Church, wage their war of resistance with the weapons of Gospel truth and Christian antiquity.

But I am digressing. Speaking for both branches of the United Church, I believe that its watchwords are moderation and toleration ; and that, in proportion as each community is moderate and tolerant, she speaks the mind of her Divine Head. Among the guarantees of that moderation and that toleration, I hold, as I have already indicated, that the existing formularies—taken altogether and as a traditional body of documents—hold a principal place ; in consideration not only of their contents in themselves, but of the fact that these documents have long outlived the strife of

tongues and the antagonism of passions, out of whose turmoil they rose up in their present shape. As they stand, and with their actual associations, they are the bulwarks of free and manly religion—based on the truths of the Gospel and rich with the science of the human heart. To borrow the eloquent words of one of the speakers at your late Convention,* they are “the landmarks of the Church. The Jewish landmarks secured merely the possession of a few rods of land to an individual for a short term of years; but these are the landmarks of the Church, the landmarks of a heavenly inheritance, and of everlasting possession.”

Such is, I venture to affirm, the value of fixity in our existing formularies as the regulating and moderating influence of the “Reformed Church” in England and in Ireland, apart from any questions relative to the practical re-arrangement or augmentation of the services. With these the Committee has by its appointment nothing to do, and they shall not, therefore, occupy our attention except to invite one word of passing apprehension lest the perils of the changes involved in the powers entrusted to that body may embarrass and delay the Church in turning to the work of devotional compilation.

My anxieties are at this moment for Ireland, and not for England. The Church of Ireland lies before my eyes outraged and despoiled by the imperial legislature. Her old conditions of civil life have been violently swept away. Her future career is all her own, to shape out under all the disadvantages of universal unsettlement. How far is this revolution a call to her to recast those title deeds, which she has hitherto shared with her English sister, in exclusive conformity with the supposed requirements of her own internal condition; or how far, on the other side, to throw herself in loving confidence upon the bosom of that sister, believing in and confessing her affection, recognising her power and

* Dr. Romney Robinson.

her desire to befriend the communion linked to her by unison of doctrine and practice? If the first course is the one which duty counsels and prudence approves, the Committee should rather have been appointed in the broader terms of Mr. Brookes's original motion than in the more cautious language of the Duke of Abercorn's substitute. But, if the second course approves itself to the counsels of wisdom, then—as I shall proceed further to argue—the ambiguous latitude of the resolution as it stands may prove to be the origin of future misunderstanding, culminating in that worst kind of division which arises from antagonistic interpretations of the same document.

I would dilate upon the multiplied considerations which are as golden links, connecting the loyal Irish with the English people, and therefore the Irish with the English Church; but I fear to enter on the catalogue, lest I should seem to be resting my plea upon a material rather than a moral basis. I do not wish to incur the retort, “We know that the English Church is more numerous, more wealthy, and more powerful, but we do not know that she is more learned, more earnest, more self-sacrificing, and more pure in faith and morals, and we therefore altogether decline to take our place by her side as the poor relation.” With such feelings I most cordially agree; and I should wish every word which I might have written blotted out which could be distorted into such a signification. As one equal to another, the English invites the Irish Church at this crisis to rely, not upon her sister's patronage, but upon her sympathy, and not to multiply her own difficulties by assuming burdens which England may not feel herself competent to take part in bearing. As long as there is hereditary identity of formulary between the two Churches, however differently those formularies may be worked, according to the diversities of local circumstance, the Church in Ireland can appeal to that of England, the Church of England to that

of Ireland, without *arrière pensée* or explanatory definition. Each body relies upon its antecedently recognised position, and their intercourse is the outpouring of confidential kinship, not the regulated correspondence of diplomatic amity.

But I may be told that I am forecasting a very complicated tangle of disastrous results from premises totally inadequate to lead to such monstrous consequences—I may hear that, after all, the Duke of Abercorn's Committee, in contrast to that which Master Brookes was originally desirous to appoint, is so fenced in and circumscribed by the terms of its appointment, that at the best or the worst, the reforms which it can suggest in the Prayer Book, even if adopted in their fulness, cannot affect the substantial identity, and the more than sisterly relationship of the two Churches. I shall not have recourse to the obvious rejoinder, that if the results are to be so slight, it was hardly worth risking the excitement which has attended the creation of the Committee, in order to compass such small advantages. It will be more satisfactory and more respectful to test the Committee in the terms of its own appointment, as those who may either have to serve upon it, or to probe its conclusions, will have themselves to do.

The peril which I mainly apprehend from the action of the Committee, is one which will easily arise from the dangerous ambiguity which has crept into the terms of its appointment. I cannot bring myself to believe that those who adopted it were aware, at the time they were voting, that they were actually constituting a tribunal empowered and instructed not only to interpret, but to create, the law which it could, without revision and without appeal, itself proceed to administer. The words which, by implication, convey these extraordinary powers are—"without making *such* alterations in the Liturgy or Formularies of our Church as would involve or imply a change in her doctrines." The

limitation, as you will observe, centres in and is defined by the one word "such." If, therefore, words have any meaning, the Committee is empowered to propose all alterations in the Prayer Book and Formularies, with only the one limitation that these shall be such as, in the uncontrolled discretion of the legislative Committee, do not directly or by implication change doctrine. This statement is no extravagant assumption of my own, for it is based upon the sound maxim of reasoning, that the overt exclusion of one contingency is the absolute admission of all others. In the present case accordingly every proposition, which the Committee by any majority, at any quorum which it may adopt, may declare to be undoctrinal, becomes an alteration of Prayer Book, or of the Articles which it is at liberty to propose for the formal acceptance of the Irish Church. Here, then, we come full face with the questions—What is, and what is not, doctrine? What is, and what is not, change? What are, and what are not, the doctrinal portions of the services and the formularies, and what formulary can there be which is not doctrinal? Behind these questions comes the inquiry—who are the judges competent, legally, morally, and constitutionally, either to answer these inquiries, or to give practical action to their own answers? No preliminary decision was arrived at in the Convention upon these heads, no specific instructions were given to the Committee upon these all-important matters. No tribunal was in existence before its appointment, to smooth the way for settling these grave preliminaries, and none has been created consequent upon its nomination to help it in an inquiry, in which every difficulty of law, fact, and theology, grows up and is twined together like the shrubs and the creepers of a tropical jungle. One thing only is certain—that the difficulty, greater or smaller, having arisen in respect of certain incidents of Church practice or Church teaching, which are variously held by

different persons to be more or less justifiable or unjustifiable within the letter of the doctrines of the Church, a Committee has been named for the purpose of suppressing or restraining those practices and teachings as by other means, so by such alterations, and such alone, in the Liturgy and other Formularies as do not touch doctrine—the doctrine itself being at this moment the one uncertain quantity by which these practices and teachings must stand or fall. Plainly then this Committee—hastily thrown together with an admitted party bias—must, by the terms of its appointment, become the supreme tribunal competent to declare what is, and what is not, the doctrine of the Church upon all the particular points which the records of parish disputations, of suits in the Arches Court, and before the Privy Council, of Royal Commissions, and of literature substantial or ephemeral, within our own lifetime, have shown to be the most difficult and the most exasperating of all the perils through which our Church is passing at a crisis which otherwise the shining catalogue of churches built, or raised from degradation, of schools created, of services undertaken and multiplied, of preachings strong in their wrestlings with the temptations and the infirmities of the human heart, of delicately nurtured volunteers devoting themselves to the work of the physician of soul and body and of the Christian almoner, of missions to the fallen at home and to heathen lands, all indicate as an epoch of brightness and consolation to the Church of the people.

The respect which I feel for the gentlemen thrown by the irony of fate into the false and hopeless position of being compelled to serve upon that Committee, restrains me from suggesting the bewilderment, the antagonism, the blank inability of hitting upon an acceptable common ground, the purposeless graspings after compromise which must haunt

the deliberations of a body, called out of nothingness to declare what are the doctrines of the Church, in order—without confessedly changing those doctrines, while it handles the documents in which the doctrine is enshrined—to restrain, by alterations in the Prayer Book, practices and teachings which are admissible if they accord with those doctrines, and inadmissible if they deviate from their standard. Observe how the difficulties are multiplied from the fact that the Committee has not been empanelled to try any one specific allegation, nor even any one specific list of allegations. It will have, in the first instance, *mero motu* to make out a *prima facie* list of assumed “novel doctrines and practices opposed to the principles of our Reformed Church,” and when it has succeeded in this task it will have to take the cases one by one, and to try each of them upon its own merits at the bar of the existing “Liturgy and Formularies.” Then if these are brought in guilty upon their personal opinion, their next step must be so to “change” that “Liturgy and Formularies” without changing the “doctrines” of which those documents are the conservators, as in the opinion of the wide Church public, before whom their resolutions will come for final ratification, to have effectually checked the novelties, and yet to have left the Liturgy and the Formularies effectively just where they found them.

The achievement, if successful, is one which will redound to the immortal credit of the band of gentlemen who had bravely undertaken so delicate and so perilous a task, and who had in the accomplishment of their voluntary work brought to bear such high intelligence, such sensitive tact, such pellucid fairness, such minute and accurate learning. But if the result should be that, in the opinion of any considerable section of the Church, they had disarranged the balance of the Church’s doctrine—

“ Be it but so much
As makes it light or heavy in the substance,
Or the division of the twentieth part
Of one poor scruple ; nay, if the scale do turn
But in the estimation of a hair—”

Then all their labour will have been in vain—their Report, because it will have failed of an unanimous, or at least of a preponderating acceptance, will have been virtually rejected before it was put to the vote, and matters will be left just where they are at present, with the difference of much time lost and much ill-blood bred. Above all things, the Committee will have broken up the broad highway of conciliation. All those appeals to that higher Christian expediency, of which the root is charity, will hereafter be powerless if they are addressed to those whose cherished convictions have been tried—no matter with what result—in their personal absence by a secret tribunal, expounding laws of its own enacting by rules of court of its own invention.

A Report embodying the personal agreement to differ of the members of the Committee, and therefore proposing nothing, might not be a very dignified conclusion to its deliberations ; but I believe—in face of the great difficulties of framing and the greater difficulties of carrying out any alterations, and of the discredit which could not fail to attach to counsels tendered only to be thrown aside—that such a conclusion, though not the most heroic, would be the safest, the wisest, and the happiest.

But let us assume that the Committee should have agreed upon what in its own opinion did or did not involve doctrine, and then upon such definition of its own framing should have recommended changes in the formularies adequate in its judgment to reach those whom it was intended to restrain, and yet in the belief of the framers so nicely tempered as not to hurt or to abash, not to aggrandise or inflate, any one man or any set of men beyond the doomed band ; where then would the

Church be viewed as a whole—not as it emerged from the crucible of the Reformation, one body welded together by the stern hammer blows of Tudor potentates and trembling parliaments, in whose eyes to be a subject was to be a churchman, and to be a non-conformist was to be a rebel—but as it exists at present, rooted firmly, because widely, in the different affections of many men, whose temperament and whose mental process are as diverse as their social stations or political prepossessions?

The Church of England, as it exists not by its title-deeds but in actual practice, comprehends three subsections, willing and able to pull together, as from other considerations, some moral and others material, so by their joint acquiescence in a Prayer Book, inherited by all now living, and manipulated by none. Of these subsections two are of ancient lineage, and they possess their distinct characteristics of old date and well-defined outline. The High Church one is often accused of an undue leaning towards Rome, and it repudiates the imputation; while the Low Church has as often to listen to the charge of undue Genevan predilections, and is as emphatic in denying that the points on which that imputation is based involve any disloyalty to the English Church, or preference for the system of Calvin. The third subsection, the Broad Church, was first invested with its distinctive appellation in our own time in an article contributed to the 'Edinburgh Review' by the late Mr. Conybeare. The term was eagerly caught at, and its epigrammatic vigour served to rally an otherwise very incohesive body of independent thinkers. The indictment laid against this party is, that its predilections are unduly enlisted in favour of the rationalising schools of Protestant Germany and Voltairian France; and it does not in the case of many of its representative members repudiate the charge as anything to excuse or to be ashamed of.

The middle term of the three schools is the Prayer Book, as it is according to the compromise of 1662. Many High Churchmen would very likely prefer, as a question of abstract choice, that the Prayer Book which was in use between 1549 and 1552 were still the standard; many Low Churchmen, I dare say, regret that the alterations proposed in 1689 should have been nipped in the bud; many Broad Churchmen, I conclude, have excogitated their own ideal book of the future; but as no one of these discordant sections has any reasonable chance of coaxing or coercing the two other sections to its own wishes, the moderate majority of the united triad consents to working together under a system which any one may believe might be better, but which every one knows could be worse.

The Prayer Book in its present form has become the Magna Charta of Church liberty, impartially protecting High, Low, and Broad, against the aggressive tyranny of either or both of the variant sections. An independent Irish Prayer Book recast on principles tinged with partizan feelings, would be a Gortchakoff-like circular, proclaiming the dissolution of the Treaty with England, and the conflict which would ensue here would soon make its disturbing influence felt on your side of the Channel, in aggravation of any local disturbance; or if none of home growth were to ensue, the seeds of dissension would be rapidly and abundantly blown over from England.

It is not my place to discover or to assume the proportions of High, of Low, and of Broad Churchmen in Ireland. All these sections do exist in the Irish Church, and one or two of them would probably find its or their position the weaker from the proposed alterations in the Prayer Book. The first and obvious policy of the weakened party would be an alliance offensive and defensive with their English sympathisers. On the other hand, that section in England which agreed with the victorious school in Ireland would of course

use it as a convenient instrument by which to push its personal advantage in England, without any overwhelming care for the result to Ireland and its church population. In a word, to use a metaphor now painfully significative, the war would not be localised, but the reverse.

But I am bound, in dealing with the future, to follow out the question into all its possible contingencies, and I will now suppose that all the preliminary difficulties have been overcome, and that the Committee has not only succeeded in framing a scheme of professedly undoctrinal reforms in the Prayer Book, but in persuading the General Synod to accept its proposals. What then will be the legal and practical weight of the new Prayer Book as compared with that of the existing one? It is not impertinent in me to assume after reading the debates in the Convention that the drift of the alterations will be in a direction favourable to the Low Church section of the community. That section as it is, finds without doubt much in the Prayer Book which it accepts with a preference, as in its opinion making for its side of the question. It also finds more or less which in its heart of hearts it might prefer had been otherwise put. But on the whole it accepts and works the book as it stands. The same statement without the alteration of a word also represents the position of the High Church section. Each section, it may be, attaches the most literal and stringent interpretation to its more favourite portions, and the most liberal and elastic to those which are the favourites of the other side. The result of this difference of treatment is that the Prayer Book as a whole, and as it stands, holds its own as a workable institution upon a basis of interpretation far less strict than that which any Act of Parliament would secure at the hands of any Court. But once this old book is thrown into the crucible, the document in its remodelled state will bristle with stringency in every line. Every sentence will have been assumedly revised

by the Committee, and altered or retained accordingly. What is kept will be reckoned to have been left unaltered by deliberate forethought, upon the same principles as that which will have been changed, will have been confessedly recast for some special reason. Every portion therefore of what are considered the more High Church parts of the book which may survive will become for the future High Church with an accuracy and an emphasis which it does not actually possess, for it will have been deliberately reenacted by the revisionists. A moderate revision might accordingly result in actually strengthening the position of that section, which it was the desire of the promoters of the movement to keep in check.

On the other hand, a trenchant recast of the book would most probably lead to results little contemplated by a committee quietly working within four walls, and listening to little beyond each other's suggestions; and if it did not cause an absolute disruption, would certainly foster and consolidate a deeply discontented and aggressive party within the precincts of the Church. But possibly—such is the weakness and uncertainty of human action—the revision might neither be moderate all through, nor yet altogether trenchant; but in some places the one, and in others the other, retaining some things which High Churchmen may particularly prize, and omitting or qualifying others which Low Churchmen are most anxious to have omitted or qualified. This conclusion resulting, as it would do, in giving to both parties a legal status of a new and more precise character than either of them already possesses, would be simply the initiation and sanction of a legalised and interminable faction fight within the walls of the sanctuary, between two bodies of men, both of which would very acutely notice the improved vantage ground which it would have won from the revisionists, and would be very unwilling

or very unable to perceive the corresponding advantage which had fallen to the lot of its antagonist. In the mean while the Broad Church section would have become disgusted and exasperated by the advantage which dogmatism would have gained in the person of High, or of Low, or of both ; and either as the formal ally of one or the other side, or as a third and neutral party, equally unfriendly to both, would add a potent disintegrating element to the seething cauldron of confusion.

But so long as the Church hung at all together, the persons who would be really hardest hit by the procedure, would not be the headstrong and extreme clique who are truly responsible for the present general dis temper. These men justify their eccentricities by appeals to a higher law, of which they have made themselves interpreters and judges. They do not pretend to look into the Liturgy and Formularies for the warrant of their proceedings. They assert that this or that thing is “Catholic,” and they accordingly do or say this or that thing because their own higher law decrees its catholicity. Short, therefore, of turning these gentlemen out of the Church, you will not touch them by any changes in the Prayer Book. You may enlarge the apparent divergence between their actions and those of Prayer Book Churchmen, but the grounds of those actions will be unshaken. What you will do, however, is that, supposing you succeed in turning them out of the Church, you will have effected your object, by a permutation of the Prayer Book, so thorough and so dogmatic, as to import distress and perplexity into the minds and consciences of moderate High Churchmen, whose good and wholesome labours for the common cause rest upon their acceptance of the actual formularies.

After all, the position of any Church, in a country where open toleration exists as it does in England, must be re-

viewed by the light of its relations to the whole body public, and not exclusively by that of the internal action of its own community. It follows from this truth that in order fully to judge of the expediency of a severe handling of that ultra section, we cannot afford to lose sight of them even after they may have been compelled to leave the Church. It is quite conceivable that they might succeed as an independent sect in winning proselytes from the residuary body, who would otherwise have been retained and kept in order, by that surest antagonism to excess which is offered by the constant example and gentle influence of corporate moderation. In this aspect of the case I do not hesitate to say that the moderate High Church party is the best bulwark within the Church against the extreme wing. Anything which paralyses that party gives additional opportunities to the ultra wing to make conquests, which will not tell the less effectively upon the opposite section, or—to speak more correctly—upon the whole community, because they might be won by those who had become outsiders, in favour of some body no longer within the formal circle of the Church. The same argument, in the same terms, is equally applicable to any violent proceeding on the part of High Churchmen which might result in a secession on the Low Church side.

It may, however, be pleaded that it is, in point of fact, the desire of some at least of those who promoted the Committee to disturb at all hazards the *status in quo* of the High Church section, and not merely to check specific practices for which that section as a whole cannot be held as in any way responsible. It may be argued that the mischiefs produced by those practices are so great that nothing short of sharp and strong material guarantees covering a wider ground than that of the absolute and literal grievance would be effective. If this be the true explanation of the

policy involved in the Committee, we see daylight; and the ambiguity in the terms of the reference, of which I have been complaining, disappears. At what price success in this object would be purchased I proceed to indicate.

The first inevitable result would be the alienation—more or less overt, but real and hardly unjustifiable—of that High Church section of the Church in England whose wishes, goodwill, and sympathetic co-operation would be of the highest value to the Irish Church during the progress of its re-settlement. The second result would assume one out of two forms. The alterations must, upon the whole, be favourable either to the Low or to the Broad Church section. If the Low Church should get the advantage, the consequence would be that the Broad Church section would look to its own position, which is as antagonistic to the positive dogmatic assertions—whenever sharply and distinctly advanced—of the Low as of the High Church system, and shape its policy accordingly. This policy would without doubt be one of co-operation with High Churchmen in giving the cold shoulder to the re-cast Irish Church. If, on the other hand, the Broad Church come out victors, the Low Church would, in course of time, find itself drawn into an understanding, confessed or acknowledged, with its older antagonist in favour of the principle of specific doctrine, which would bode no good to a latitudinised Irish Church. The third result would be that even the victorious party, whether Low or Broad, would discover that the contingent patronage of its own re-adjusted Irish Church would not be so simple a procedure, as either or both would find its support under the actual condition of *uti possidetis*. As the Prayer Book and Articles stand, each section has a colourable pretext for claiming the support of the entire body while it sustains, as a whole, that Church whether in England or Ireland, with the tacit but recognised reservation—the more cheerfully acknowledged

because the less formally proclaimed — that it finds the apology for its own position within the tolerant pages of those cautious and comprehensive formularies. But once erect the Liturgy and Formularies within the realm of Ireland into the monument of Low Church or of Broad Church victory, and then you convert the sympathy—moral or material—which members of the Church of England give to the Church which relies upon those documents in Ireland into direct aid and succour to those elements of the Low or of the Broad system which are most antipathetic to the other two systems. The repression, in comparison with the other allied Churches of the reformed Episcopal Communion, of the Irish Church will then become a politico-ecclesiastical necessity either of High in alliance with Low or of High in alliance with Broad against, as it may be, Broad or Low. In either case the co-operation of the two allies, according to the mathematical necessities of strategy, must inevitably overmatch the efforts of their unaided antagonist. The confusion so engendered will be worse confounded from the operation of the feelings so felicitously pointed out by your Grace during the debate, that any change made with an intention was evidence that the party against which it was directed had previously a legal standing ground. Whether the extreme section be kept within or excluded from the Church by any changes which might be initiated by the Committee, it will be certainly a position capable of cogent argument (supposing changes of any kind) that the party must hitherto have had a legitimate *locus standi* within the Church in the terms of the old Prayer Book. In addition, therefore, to the natural irritation arising out of changes directed against their own valued prepossessions, a special grievance will have been created founded on the patent fact that the whole procedure will be an example of that confusion of the judiciary and the legislative offices concisely summed up in the well-known words of Virgil, *castigatque auditque*. The

chastisement will be involved in the change of formularies, and the world will then hear, to its astonishment, that every practice hit or checked by that change can by the fact of alteration claim to have been up to that time legal and justifiable, however repugnant to the tastes and convictions of brother Churchmen.

It is very painful to me to have to borrow the phraseology, and to appeal to the motives of political or military strategy, in dealing with the affairs of a spiritual commonwealth. But the necessity has been put upon me to handle the question under lights which I never should voluntarily turn upon it. The Church of England must either be tolerant or intolerant. If intolerant it must find some Popedom either personal or in commission, or some substitute for an Ecumenical Council not liable to interruption by the regiments of any neighbouring state. If it is to continue tolerant without becoming indifferentist and definite without shrivelling into bigotry, it cannot do better under existing circumstances than go on with the actual formularies; not because they might not in some way be made better—just as they might in some other way be made worse—but because, being there, they are undoubtedly good, and, being undoubtedly good, are likewise in possession. This condition of matters, evacuating as it does for the present time the difficulties of controversy, would leave the Church of Ireland free to follow its spiritual instincts and its missionary duties, with the Prayer Book, as a practical and generally accepted body of devotion, ready to hand to guide and stimulate its worship. But the Prayer Book recast—whether for the abstract better or the abstract worse—in a special direction may indeed be made the special spiritual guide of those who symbolize with the changes; but, to all who do not, it assumes for the immediate emergency the character of a cartel of controversial defiance. Such cartel may sometimes be necessary, and such defiance

may be righteous ; but neither the necessity nor the righteousness tends to conciliate the parties against which the defiance is hurled. In the present case I venture to doubt the necessity, and to deprecate the cartel.

I have spoken my mind fully and freely, but I trust that your Grace will not think that I have done so unkindly. I lament and I resent the wrongs and the misfortunes of the Irish Church, and I feel how natural it is that, while she is under the influence of such feelings, the community, acting by its Synods, might be inclined to courses of action from which it would shrink in more peaceful and prosperous times. But it is the contemplation of this very temptation which has led me to submit the doubts and cautions which have presented themselves to the mind of a friendly bystander contemplating the scene from an English watch-tower.

I cannot help apprehending that the exasperation roused in the minds of members of the Irish Church, by its forcible and unjust disestablishment, may not unnaturally lead them to overlook the reflective advantage to themselves of identity with the still Established Church of England ; and with regard to the question of the Formularies, to dwell upon the fact that the authoritative Prayer Books of the Scottish and the American Episcopal Churches are not identical with the Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments established by law.

Having, therefore, discussed the advantages of identity, I must, before I conclude this letter, say a few words upon the apparent precedents in the other direction of the Scottish and American Prayer Books. I believe that I can show that the circumstances under which these variant Formularies were produced, were so different from those which at present interest the Irish Church, that the very fact of the existence of these differing books (on the value of which I offer no opinion) is one of the

strongest arguments against the expediency of compiling an independent Irish Prayer Book at this particular crisis. I beg you to note the word expediency, for it does not require the precedents of Scotland and of the United States to prove the right of the Irish Church, as of any other independent Church, to frame its own formularies for itself. That right would exist with the same intrinsic vigour whether or not the Churches in those two lands had previously exercised it. But expediency, while drawing its teachings from precedent, ultimately rests upon the *res nata*; and so wherever the *res nata* finds itself illustrated by precedent, the argument of expediency is most strong and convincing. The special Scottish Communion office (the forms of Morning and Evening Prayer, being identical with those of the English Prayer Book), is a modified form of that which the Scotch Bishops framed for their Church on the reintroduction of Episcopacy during the reign of Charles I., when Scotland was still a separate kingdom, only united with England by the personal tie of having the same Sovereign, with different Parliament, different laws, almost different language. On the second reintroduction of Episcopacy in Scotland by Charles II., no authorised Prayer Book was enjoined upon the country, and the Formulary was only adopted in its present altered shape by the Bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church after their misplaced devotion to the house of Stuart had not only lost them the favour of William III., and their chance of preserving their established status, but had subjected them and their community to long and aggravated trials of spoliation and persecution. When at length the days of toleration arrived, a concurrent use of the English Prayer Book, in its entirety, was conceded by the Scottish Episcopal Church; and any subsequent change has been to the advantage of the *status in quo* of the English Formulary, and to the disadvantage of the indigenous one. It is manifest that the

Irish Church cannot draw a precedent for altering that which it already holds in common with England, from the history of the gradual drawing together of the originally independent Episcopal Churches of England and of Scotland, particularly when it recollects, till a very late date, the ministers of the former could not by Act of Parliament lend their pulpits to those of the latter; nor till a much later one could English patrons present Scottish ordained clergymen to the livings in their gift.

The case will not be bettered by reference to the circumstances under which the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States constructed its particular Prayer Book. The Churchmen of those old English colonies had gone on languishing generation after generation, prevented by the indifference or jealousy of the mother country from organizing their church in its completeness by the institution of a local Episcopate. At last came the Civil War and the Revolution, and the Churchmen of the thirteen states were empowered to frame their own constitution by the bitter arbitrament of bloodshed and civil hatred. They sought and found their Episcopate through two channels. Bishop Seabury, of Connecticut, was consecrated by the unestablished Church in Scotland, and represented the special High Church theology of that communion; Bishop White, of Pennsylvania, and his companions received their episcopal orders at Lambeth, and returned imbued with the mild and courtly politeness of the Established Church of George III. The divines who undertook for the American States the revision of the Prayer Book with, in all probability, the intention, above all things, of procuring its acceptance on the plea that it was *not* the Prayer Book of then hated England, represented the differing schools of Seabury and White. To the former is due a Communion Service towards which the Scottish form, rather than the English, has been laid under contribution,

and which I do not think will be likely to be chosen by the Committee as the model of its changes. The divines who drew their inspirations from the gentle and polished White were the authors of the omission of the Athanasian Creed, of the substitution of "who" for "which" in the Lord's Prayer, of the elegant retrenchment of the "Virgin's womb," and of the banishment of Magnificat and Nunc Dimitis from evening worship. I think that I need not multiply words to show that this Prayer Book, the offspring of civil strife in the first place, and of divided internal counsels in the second, would be a disastrous model for the Irish Church to select as the guide of its future self-regulation.

There is only one more consideration to which I must refer before I close this letter. All public movements have a tendency—right, within due limits—towards compromise; and it is, therefore, not impossible that in face of the difficulties inherent in any scheme of absolute alteration of the Formularies, the Committee may alike endeavour to gratify the party which values identity with England, and that which advocates change with a single eye to the supposed requirements of Ireland, by leaving the letter of the Liturgy and Formularies as it stands, and yet supplementing that letter with a body of explanatory and modifying glosses in the form of rubrics, notes, or canons. Upon this project, should it be entertained, I have merely to observe that the expedient would either effect too much or else too little for the objects of its promoters and for the peace of the Church. If these rubrics, notes, or canons were intended to possess a value identical with the text on which it was proposed that they should cast a light additional to, or corrective of, that with which it is at present illuminated, it will be but a transparent play upon words to assert that the Formularies will have passed the ordeal of the Committee without having been subjected to changes of a doctrinal nature.

In this way all the evils which I have endeavoured to point out in the preceding part of this letter, would be incurred, with the additional grievance of a colour of subterfuge being spread over the process sufficient to exacerbate feelings already sufficiently irritated. If, on the contrary, it were maintained that these parasitical additions, however valuable within their own limits, were not to be reckoned as possessing an authority equivalent to that of the original documents, the door will be opened to an amount of misunderstanding and of bewilderment—if not, possibly, of equivocation—which would require the gifts of a Sanchez or an Escobar, rather than of any straightforward English or Irish clergyman to comprehend and harmonise. In either case the Church in England would be excused if it paused to consider how far these interpretations, upon which it had not been consulted, would affect its intimate union with the Irish Church.

There are many other considerations bearing upon the question on which I might dilate; but I forbear, in the belief that I have given sufficient reasons for the conclusion that the happiest and safest result at which the Committee can arrive will be to report that, upon a broad and comprehensive review of the whole affair, it recommends that the Irish Church should rest content with those Formularies which regulate the devotions and guide the belief of that great Church, of which it has been, is, and intends to remain, bone of bone and flesh of flesh.

I have the honour to remain,

My dear Lord Primate,

Yours most respectfully,

A. J. B. BERESFORD HOPE.





